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75925-g

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 July 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Allan Evans (OIR)
Colonel Gerald F. Lillard, USA (G-2)
Captain Allan L. Reed, USN (ONI)
Colonel Jack E. Thomas, USAF (AFOIN-2B)
Captain John A. Holbrook, USN (JIG)
Mr. Malcolm Henderson, AEC
Mr. Victor Keay, FBI

SUBJECT : SE-36/1: Soviet Capabilities for Clandestine Attack on the US with Atomic Weapons

1. The attached draft estimate constitutes a revision of paragraphs 27 and 28 of SE-36 pursuant to a meeting with your representatives on 30 June.

2. Please let me know by close of business Monday, 5 July, whether a clean-up session will be required prior to submission of this estimate to the IAC.

3. At the same time I request your advice whether this estimate (as it stands, or as revised at a clean-up session) can be cleared informally with the members of the IAC in lieu of its consideration at a formal IAC meeting.

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[redacted]
Acting Executive Secretary

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

2 July 1953

SUBJECT: SE-36/1: SOVIET CAPABILITIES FOR CLANDESTINE ATTACK ON THE US WITH ATOMIC WEAPONS

NOTE

SE-36, "Soviet Capabilities for Attack on the US through Mid-1955," was published on 5 March 1953.

The text which follows below constitutes a revision of paragraphs 27 and 28 of SE-36 for the purpose of clarifying the estimate contained therein and supersedes that portion of SE-36.

These paragraphs relate solely to the clandestine delivery of atomic weapons against targets in the US, and cover the entire treatment of that subject in SE-36.

CLANDESTINE DELIVERY

27. Atomic Weapons: The USSR is capable of producing atomic weapons which could be smuggled into the US either as complete assemblies or as component parts or subassemblies. The assembled devices could range from small-yield weapons (5 KT or less) weighing a few hundred pounds to larger-yield weapons (possibly up to 500 KT) weighing several thousand pounds. Their size could range from that of a package small enough to fit into the luggage compartment of an automobile to that of a packing case large enough to contain an automobile.

27a. All of these weapons could be designed to break down into a number of relatively simple and readily transportable components. Those designed to give a relatively low kilotonnage yield would not require much labor or technical training to assemble. More labor and more training would be required to assemble weapons designed to give high yields, and, once assembled, they would be more difficult to transport.

27b. It is conceivable that only the fissionable material, in small pieces, need be smuggled into the US, since other components

could be fabricated or procured in this country. This scheme, however, would require careful advance planning and coordination by supervisory personnel with engineering skill and familiarity with the US sources of needed components, and would take a longer time to carry out. It would probably result in a reduced yield for a given amount of fissionable material. It would incur a substantially greater security risk than the clandestine introduction of all components.

28. A variety of forms of clandestine delivery suggest themselves. Assembled weapons could be dropped by apparently friendly aircraft, could be detonated in the hold of a merchant ship, or could be sown as underwater mines. Either components or assembled weapons could be brought in under diplomatic immunity, smuggled across land or sea frontiers, introduced through normal import channels, or brought in as bonded merchandize awaiting transshipment. The selection of the method of introduction and of transport and assembly within the US would depend on the Soviet objective and the risk of detection which the USSR was willing to accept.

28a. Considering the known limitations of the means of physical detection, it is probable that the USSR could introduce into the US and detonate in place a considerable number of atomic weapons by clandestine means. However, the USSR would have to take into account not only the estimated chances of detection, but also the consequences of possible detection in forfeiting the element of surprise in any intended overt attack and in provoking US counteraction. As the number of weapons clandestinely introduced was increased the risk of compromise would increase. This increased risk would be less a function of US capabilities for physical detection than of the scope and complexity of the clandestine operation, particularly insofar as larger numbers of Soviet agents became involved. Considering the consequences of a breach of security, the USSR would probably be unwilling to risk the use of even selected and trained agents in such numbers as would be involved in a large-scale operation of this character. We conclude, therefore, that, although clandestine attack with atomic weapons might occur against specially selected targets as a supplement to overt delivery by air, such an attack on a scale comparable to that which might be delivered by air would probably be precluded by security considerations.

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28b. We have no evidence to indicate whether or not the USSR has actually made any plans or preparations for the clandestine delivery of atomic weapons.

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In consonance with the foregoing, subparagraph b. of paragraph 2 of SE-36 is amended by deletion of the words "and technical," so as to read:

b. The security difficulties inherent in delivery of large numbers of atomic weapons by clandestine means, particularly in inland areas.





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